

# Leadership Update

## Inside this issue:

Leaders say "sorry"	2
Avoid repeating history	2
World Youth Expo anyone?	2
Disturbing!	3
Visions for Australia	4
My ideal Australia	5
The broader picture	6

## Special points of interest:

In the average Year 12 classroom:

- ◇ Seven young people will have experienced a recognised mental disorder
- ◇ Only two of them will have sought professional help
- ◇ One will have attempted suicide

Source: *Social Ventures Australia, The Circle, 2007, p.20.*

We need real leadership.

## Le roi est mort; vive le roi.

So, in Australia, we have a new Federal Government. Now those with populist views on leadership can compare the new with the old and, depending on which side one sits, value judgements will be made.

In the past few weeks I have read a couple of articles pertinent to this.

First was from Niki Vincent of the Leadership Institute of South Australia who wrote about the "popular but false notion of the virtues of the Strong Leader" and who draws a distinction between "authority" and "leadership" - and points out that adapting to necessary fundamental change such as environmental, indigenous, and

societal issues requires leadership.

Second was the Sunday Telegraph of February 10 in which columnist Glenn Milne defines leadership as "having firm ideas, getting out in front, and selling them ..." He makes it clear he thinks that listening to other people and allowing them to influence your thinking is a fad.

The Ohio Leadership Studies at the middle of the last century made it clear that leadership requires adaptive behaviour—no one leadership style or approach will be successful all the time. Paul Hersey, a few years later, made it clear that the purpose of leadership interactions was to bring about a situation

where individuals and groups have the necessary knowledge, skill, motivation, and confidence to achieve desired results. Hersey also showed how and when the role of the leader should move from being the authoritarian decision maker to the one who allows others to make necessary decisions.

Leadership is a complex process that must be influenced by a variety of factors such as what is to be achieved, when, where, by whom, and within what constraints. Although Milne may criticize both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, in these very early days they don't seem to be doing too bad a job.

## A defining moment is not a legacy

One of the defining moments of John Howard's leadership of Australia was the Port Arthur Massacre. After that tragedy there was a groundswell of opinion that he could harness in limiting the ownership and availability of firearms in

Australia—the times and situation suited his authoritarian approach and he was widely and justifiably applauded.

One of the defining moments of Kevin Rudd's leadership is the "Sorry"

statement and Aboriginal reconciliation. A different approach is needed and is being shown.

Kevin Rudd will need to remember that it is subsequent actions that will fully determine his legacy.

## Leaders say “sorry”

When I was researching *Leaders: diamonds or cubic zirconia* one of the frequent statements that impressed me was the message that real leaders acknowledge mistakes—they recognise that leaders can (and do) make errors—even when acting with the best of intentions—and, when they become aware of this, they apologise to those affected, work with these to correct the situation, and move on.

On February 13, 2007 the Prime Minister of Australia made the “sorry”

statement in Parliament. I like most other Australians was profoundly impressed by the ceremony and the message.

At this ceremony was every living past Prime Minister of Australia—bar one, John Howard. I have criticized each one of these men (and I am sure that circumstances will arise where I am equally critical of Kevin Rudd) but I was impressed with the symbolism of their presence and I regret that John Howard refused to be part of this sym-

bolism.

Unfortunately the current myth of the “strong leader” includes the concept that it is a sign of weakness for a leader to admit that he or she was wrong. In fact the opposite is true.

Admitting errors, apologising, seeking to correct and move on is a sign of strength not weakness; it is a sign of confidence not insecurity; it is a sign of maturity not immaturity.

We need leaders in every area of life, who can say “sorry”.

## Avoid repeating history

“Today’s solutions are tomorrow’s problems.”

Most of the people who devised the programs which resulted in “the stolen generation” of Aboriginal people were probably motivated by the best of intentions—they genuinely wanted to help those they saw as disadvantaged. Unfortunately the solutions they developed created major social disruption and psychological trauma for many people—not only at the time but

for succeeding generations.

Hence the apology from Kevin Rudd.

The next “big thing” on the Government’s agenda is a summit that brings together a range of people to consider current issues and ways of resolving them. The idea is good. As is usually the case “the devil lies in the detail”.

There is a very real danger that good intentions and “sound” ideas could result in serious problems tomorrow.

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We must hope that the PM involves plenty of Australia’s youth in this summit—and listens to them!

## World Youth Expo anyone?

During the late 1990’s (and into this century) a Melbournian, Yvonne Nicolas, has tried to do something to confront world issues in a practical way. She proposes a World Youth Expo:

*“to provide the youth of the world with a platform to voice concerns, opinions and visions for the future thereby becoming a part of the on-going process of life reforming*

*change”*

Both major political parties were presented with the concept some 10 years ago and there was widespread “in principle” support. However it was obviously in the “too hard” basket for our political, social, and business leaders as, to date, she has been unable to get this up and going—after all, why should grey beards with all

their wisdom listen to the exuberance and idealism of youth? It might prove a threat to “the way we do things around here”.

Yvonne is the sort of visionary we want in leadership roles. She can see a better future not only for Australia and for Australians but for everyone. She continues to work at bringing this about.

## Disturbing!

I have been reading *The Circle*—a magazine published by Social Ventures Australia in 2007. In this they provide some statistics which I find disturbing. On p.13 it states:

*By the age of 18, one in five young Australians have experienced a major depressive episode or illness, 20% of deaths in the 15-24 age group are suicides and more than 20% of those aged 15-19 are unemployed.*

*Indigenous Australians are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed, will live on average for 18 years less and are 12 times more likely to be in jail than their non-indigenous counterparts.*

*Over 70% of people with a mental illness do not have opportunities to undertake meaningful/life enhancing work. Many have strong employment skills if fostered in the right environment.*

*We have a rapidly ageing population with the proportion of the population aged over 65 set to grow from 12.4% in 2001 to over 21% by 2031.*

Australia has a very strong economy. We have had very good management for many years (a very sincere “thank you” to Messrs Howard and Costello) but we have failed on the leadership front. We live in a society—not just an economy—and that requires both management and leadership. Hopefully the up-coming Summit will provide some of what we need.

## Visions for Australia

In the last newsletter of 2007 I called for submissions on your visions for Australia.

I have concentrated this first newsletter of 2008 on looking at Australia the way it is now. Yes, we have a very strong economy and we have the lowest unemployment level in decades—although the downside of that is rising inflation and monetary policy being used to curb inflationary pressures—but there are many people hurting

and, if we are honest, the country is not in as a good a shape overall as we would like—or, given the overall national prosperity, what it should be.

I am proud to be an Australian and, like many others, I became an Australian by choice rather than by birth. But pride in our country must not blind us to its problems. 60% of Australians own 93% of our wealth while the bot-

**“60% of Australians own 93% of our wealth while the bottom 10% owns just 1%”**

tom 10% owns just 1%. We have a disparity between rich and poor that is steadily widening—and which, eventually, could cause major social instability.

No matter how good things are today, we can make Australia an even better place for everyone. I suggest that this is a major leadership challenge for all of us—not just the politicians.

## My ideal Australia (statements published by Social Ventures Australia in 2007)

### Daniel Petre (businessman)

“Tolerant, cares for those less fortunate, idolizes people who make the world a truly better place, fulfils its moral and ethical responsibilities as a country, ... leads the world in issues of social justice, care for the environment, care for its indigenous community, and racial tolerance.”

### David Clarke (businessman)

“Tolerant, successful, confident but non-violent, with an effective safety net for the disadvantaged. A society in which there is equal opportunity for all but rewards are based on real achievements.”

### Naomi Milgrom (businesswoman)

“An Australia that realises that its true wealth lies in the talents of its people and not simply in the natural resources in the ground. My ideal would be if all its inhabitants would have the opportunity to realise their potential through quality education and access to a good livelihood.”

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## The broader picture

As the visions of Daniel Petre, David Clarke, and Naomi Milgrom make clear, leadership is not just political, religious, commercial, or social. Leadership impacts in every area of life—including the home and schools.

We cannot have a healthy society—one in which everyone has the opportunity for growth and development—unless we have a society in which all children and families are nurtured and supported.

The truth is that any abuse of children and/or young people, any spouse abuse, any discrimination based on race, religion, sexuality, gender, age, disability, colour, political affiliation, residential location, etc is unaccept-

able. Unfortunately we all know that these do occur with distressing frequency and magnitude.

Recently I spoke with a 16 year old girl, Chris, who saw another young girl collapse on a Sydney railway station—it quickly became apparent that the collapse was caused by excessive alcohol. The girl's companions refused to take any action—they were embarrassed. Chris intervened and took the trouble to ascertain name and contact details, called the girl's home, and arranged for help. She was ridiculed by a number of people around for showing leadership and concern.

Its easy to turn a blind eye. Its easy to abandon people and not to get in-

olved.

Unfortunately that's what most people do.

If we are serious about leadership then we need to realise that we are to be leaders in every part of life—and that requires that we place the needs of others at the same level as (if not above) our own needs and concerns. Leadership is not just about being out front and taking charge; its not just about being a "strong leader" - although there are times and places where such behaviours are appropriate.

Leadership is also about service—being prepared to help others and to stand up for their rights and needs despite ridicule and opposition.